

Voter Participation

Francesco Mattioli

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Voter participation

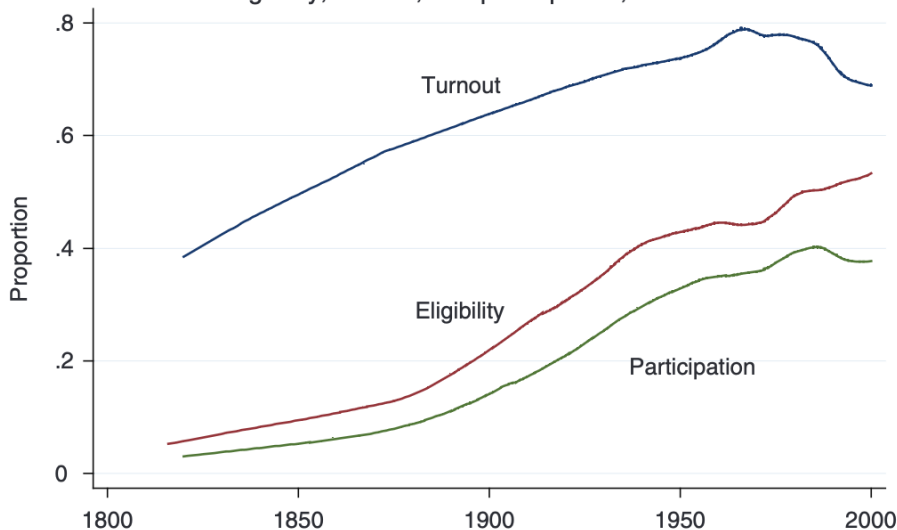
- Expansion of suffrage to larger socio-demographic groups characterized 19th and 20th century politics (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000)
- Granting voting rights has historically increased participation (Przeworski, 2009)
- But participation has two components:

$$participation = \frac{voters}{population} = \frac{eligible}{population} \times \frac{voters}{eligible}$$

- Eligibility and turnout

Historical electoral participation

Eligibility, turnout, and participation, 1815-2000



Voter participation

- Does enfranchisement increase participation of socio-demographic groups newly eligible to vote?
- Historical evidence: increases in participation are due almost exclusively to extensions of suffrage rather than to increase turnout of eligible population
- *Extensions of franchise generally depress turnout* (Przeworski, 1975)
- Negative to mixed evidence from case studies: women (Firebaugh and Chen, 1995; Corder and Wolbrecht, 2006), literacy (Larcinese, 2011)

Explaining voter turnout

- Intuition: voting is a costly decision (Downs, 1957)
- Yet people are not necessarily (economically) rational: other considerations factor in solving individuals' voting decision-making process
- What factors determine higher turnout?
- Socio-economic factors:
 - Population size: decreases turnout
 - Population concentration: weakly decreases turnout
 - Population stability: increases turnout
 - Population homogeneity: no effect
 - Previous turnout: increases turnout

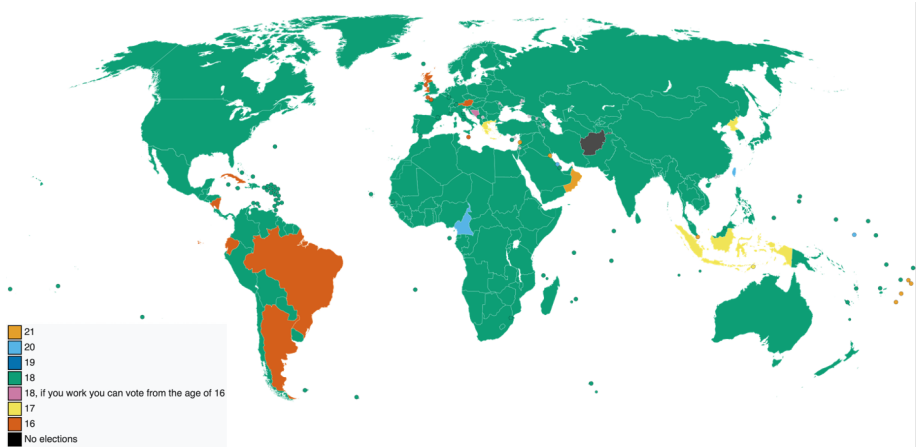
Explaining voter turnout

- Political factors:
 - Closeness: increases turnout
 - Campaign expenditure: increases turnout
 - Political fragmentation: no effect
- Institutional factors:
 - Electoral system: proportional system increases turnout
 - Compulsory voting: increases turnout
 - Concurrent elections: increase turnout
 - Registration requirement: decreases turnout

Youth Political Participation

- Generational divides in political participation (Ford and Jennings, 2020)
- Intergenerational silent revolution (Inglehart, 1971)
- Old vs young cleavage? (à la Lipset and Rokkan)
- Few opportunities to rigorously study youth political participation

Voting age across countries (2022)



Current evidence

- Curvilinear relationship between age and turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001)
- Higher turnout in the beginning of the life-cycle connected to various adult-roles, such as settling down, marriage, community ties, getting a job, and leaving school
- Pre-registration increases youth turnout (Holbein and Hilygus, 2016) and political responsiveness (Bertocchi et al., 2020)
- Lowering voting age to 16 increases attention to politics, not political engagement (Stiers, Hooghe and Dassoneville, 2020)

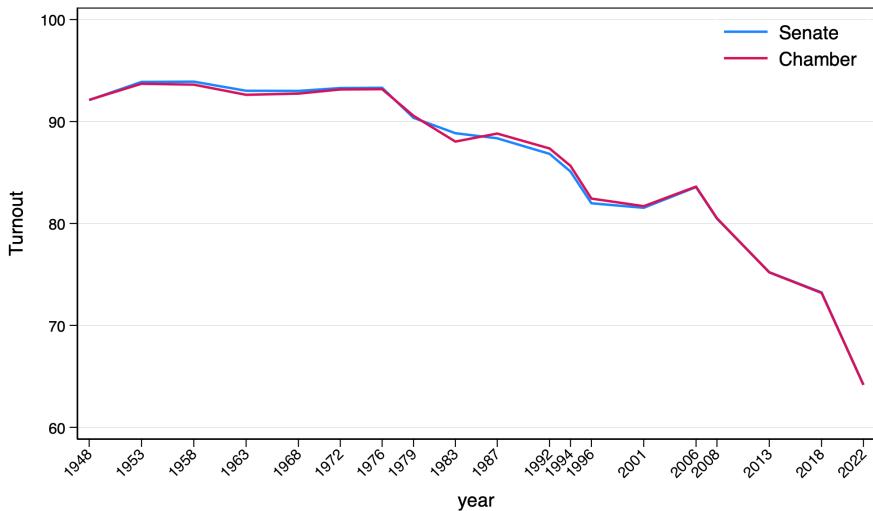
Italian institutional setting

- Parliamentary republic characterized by perfect bicameralism: lower house (Chamber of Deputies, C) and upper house (Senate, S) share same legislative powers
- General elections take place every 5 years: the composition of chambers is renewed simultaneously
- (Ever-changing) electoral law determines how voters preferences are aggregated: currently, seats are awarded on a majoritarian basis in single-member districts (37%), on a proportional basis in multi-member districts with closes lists (61%), and on a proportional basis with preference vote abroad (2%)
- Constitutional law determines the voting age characterizing the active electorate

Active electorates and the 2021 Constitutional reform

- C and S elected by different active electorates since 1948: voting age has been the only difference between the two
- 1948-1975: ≥ 21 y.o. to vote for C; ≥ 25 y.o. to vote for S
- 1976-2021: ≥ 18 y.o. to vote for C; ≥ 25 y.o. to vote for S
- 2022-: ≥ 18 y.o. to vote for C and S

Young voters and programs about external relations - Diff-in-Diff estimates



- Variations in timing, type of election and composition of population provide an ideal setting to study young voters participation using quasi-natural experiments
- Idea 1: comparing election results across C and S up to 2021 *should* capture the role played by young voters
- Idea 2: comparing S election results before and after 2021 *should* capture the role played by young voters
- Causal inference toolkit increases the likelihood of the *should*

Identification strategies

- Idea 1: Estimate the relationship between % of young voters and turnout in C upon using the % of young eligible population as an IV for the former
- Idea 2: Estimate the relationship between % of young eligible population and turnout in S using a (continuous) Diff-in-Diff before and after the 2021 Constitutional reform

- General election results from 1948 to 2022 in Italian municipalities (Ministry of Interior)
- Included info: eligible population, actual voters, votes cast for each party/coalition in C and S
- Municipality-level covariates: share of new graduates, average income, income inequality
- Programmatic party platforms across policy domains (Manifesto Project Database)

Table 1. Young voters and turnout – OLS and TSLS estimates

	Turnout			
	OLS	OLS	OLS	TSLS
	1948-2018	1948-2018	1976-2018	1976-2018
Chamber	.026*** (.005)			
% young voters		.143*** (.017)	.182*** (.025)	.111* (.046)
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	286,366	142,788	96,166	96,166
Adjusted R^2	0.802	0.802	0.823	0.007

Notes: Italian municipal elections. Robust standard errors clustered by municipality in parentheses.

† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Young voters and turnout – Dynamic TSLS estimates

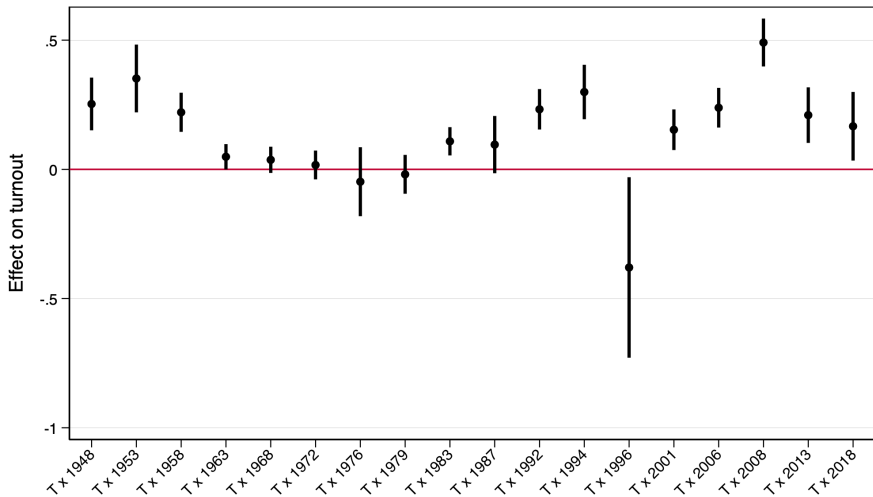


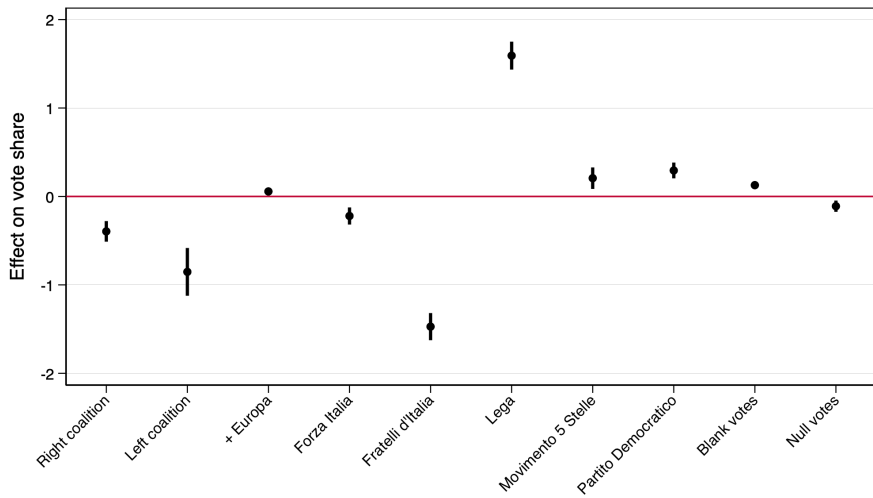
Table 2. Young voters and turnout – Diff-in-Diff estimates

	Turnout			
	1948-2022	2018-2022	2018-2022	2018-2022
% young voters \times 2022	-.713*** (0.054)	-.780*** (0.056)		
% young voters \times 2022 \times Senate			-.102*** (.016)	
% young voters \times 2022 \times % new grad.				-.758*** (.214)
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time-varying controls	×	✓	✓	✓
Observations	136,146	15,448	28,754	13,678
Adjusted R^2	0.834	0.93	0.938	0.937

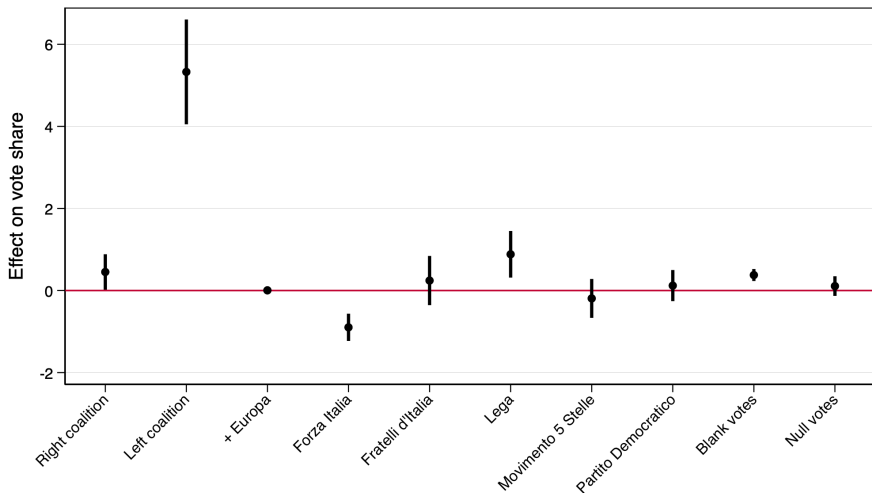
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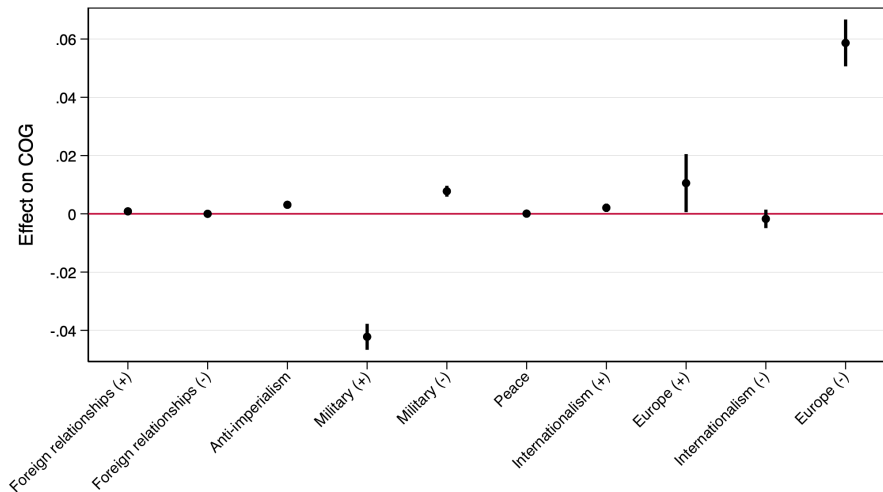
Young voters and election results - Diff-in-Diff estimates



Young voters in high education municipalities and election results - Diff-in-Diff estimates

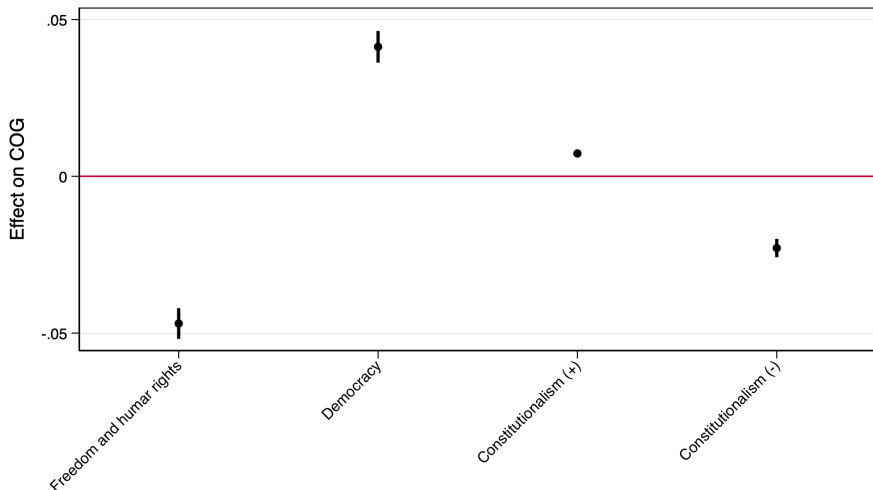


Young voters and programs about external relations - Diff-in-Diff estimates

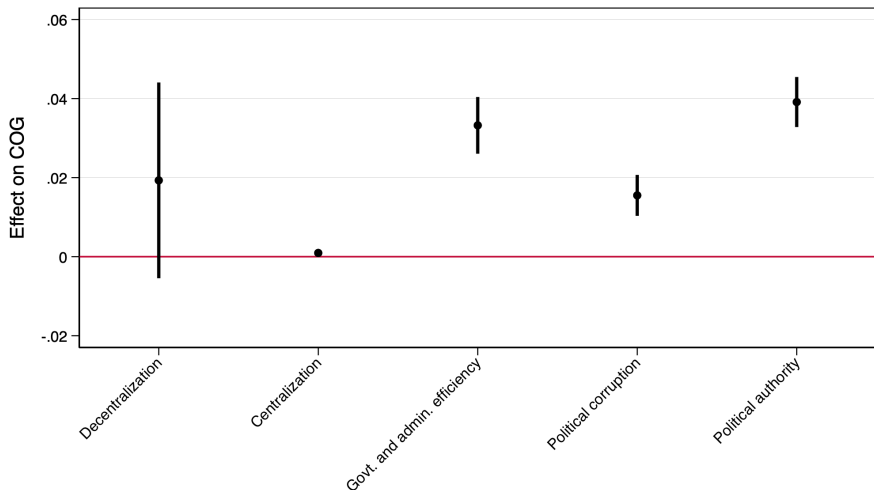


Young voters and programs about freedom and democracy

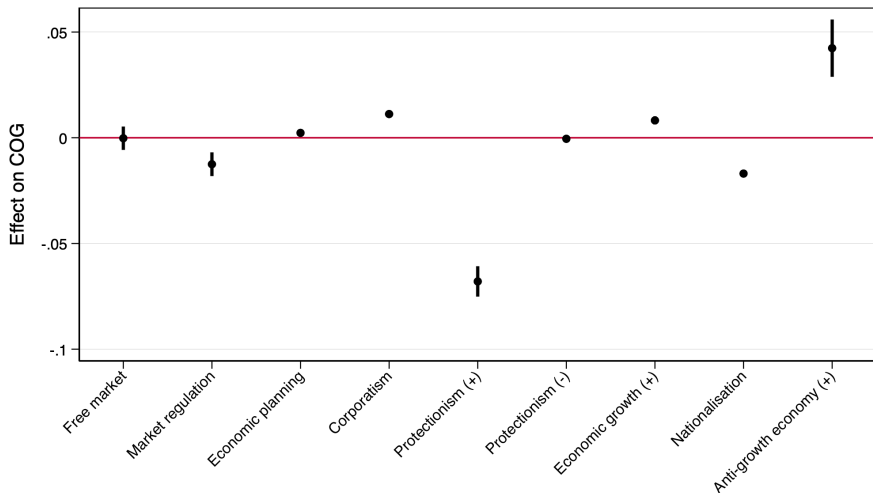
- Diff-in-Diff estimates



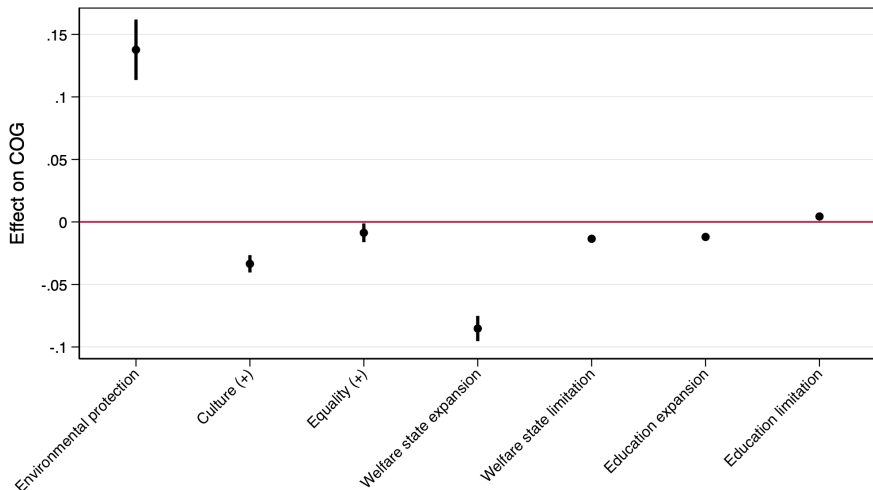
Young voters and programs about political system - Diff-in-Diff estimates



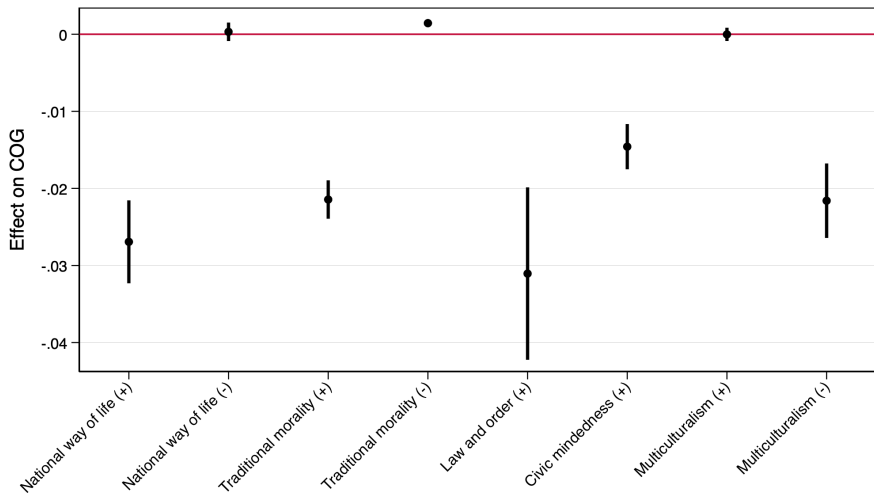
Young voters and programs about economy - Diff-in-Diff estimates



Young voters and programs about welfare and quality of life - Diff-in-Diff estimates

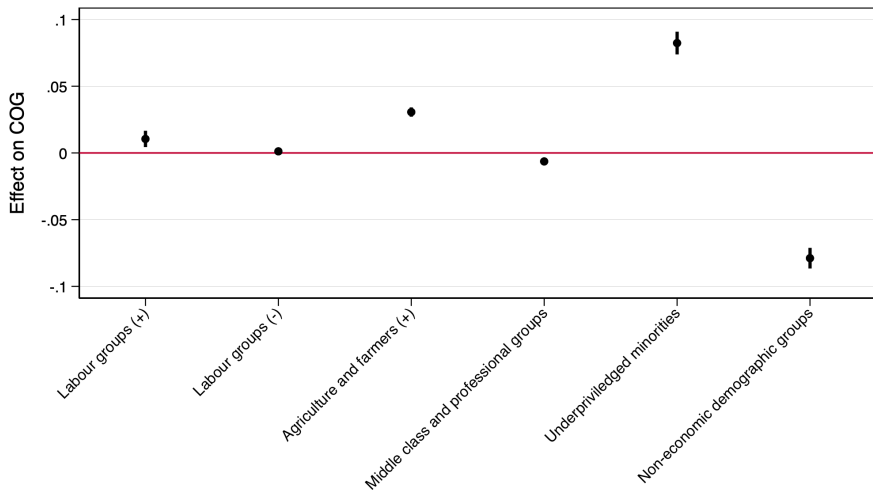


Young voters and programs about fabric of society - Diff-in-Diff estimates



Young voters and programs about social groups -

Diff-in-Diff estimates



Preliminary conclusions

- Young voters turnout has been historically higher than that of the residual population
- In the last decade, youth turnout has been decreasing
- Last election results suggest that this pattern has reversed
- Electoral decisions of young are markedly different from those of the residual population
- Young voters embedded in higher education environments vote differently than their counterparts in low education ones
- Young voters are pivotal in moving the ideological and policy-based positions of their municipalities